

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

DEAR EDITOR,

May I suggest that when the names of books are sent to the *Pianta*, the publisher and the price should also be given.

The name and the author only form scanty information for those who wish to purchase the books.

Also, might it not be a good plan to have an address given, when French pensions are recommended, so that one might know where to write for particulars?

Hoping these suggestions may meet with your approval, believe me, sincerely yours,

JESSIE H. SMITH.

Scale How,

Ambleside,

April 19th, 1909.

DEAR EDITOR,

In the last number of the *Pianta* there was a Nature Note about a bald-headed coot. The bald-headed coot is the common coot, and is not the rare one. Those who saw the bird when it was killed did not know it, and therefore concluded it was the rare one. As it was through me the false report arose, I thought I ought to correct it.—Yours sincerely,

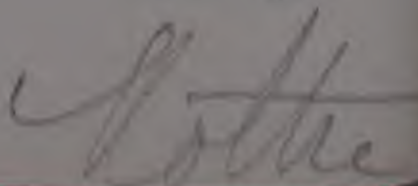
OLIVE THORP.

Dobroyd, Todmorden,
April 21st.

DEAR FRIENDS,

Last year in France they had a debate about how to teach foreign languages. The result is : Every method can be made useful with a good teacher.

T. MOLLIE.



DEAR EDITOR,

Don't you think it would be a good suggestion to ask students to write articles of everything of interest they can find in the places they are in, *in their posts*? We have had so many holiday articles, tours in France, Switzerland, etc., and everyone is fired with sudden zeal to write down their impressions of a new country and people, etc., after perhaps a three weeks' stay, and the impressions are probably the same as most other wanderers', and, unless one has lived in the place, are bound to be more or less superficial. On the other hand, in a post—at least a country post, of which there are abundance—one can get into the spirit of the place and people, living, as it were, among them. —Yours,

JOSEPHINE WILKINSON.

It would interest me immensely to know what other "country" students do in their leisure time, and what interest in the customs, etc., of the place they have.

North Court Lodge,

Brandon, Suffolk.

March 23rd, 1910.

A SEA WATER AQUARIUM.

Since early autumn we have all been much interested in the inmates of our aquarium. It consists of an ordinary gold-fish globe, about eight inches wide, and holding two quarts of water. There is a little coarse sand, some pebbles and shells at the bottom, and some thin pieces of rock, on which green seaweed is growing, are leaning against the sides. We change the water once every month or six weeks, and occasionally exchange some creatures. Since the first week we have had no deaths in this globe, though creatures that had to be put into shallower dishes did not flourish so well. Until last week we kept a red anemone about one inch in diameter, but varying in size and shape. Generally it had a flat part

on the stone like a vase on a table, then a very short thick stem swelling out at the top, its rim studded with exquisite blue bosses (like cut turquoises, only of a deeper colour), and fringed with waving tentacles.

Sometimes it became quite flat on the stone, and once assumed the shape of an old-fashioned wine glass, with graceful curving stem and tentacles withdrawn. This charming pet had several babies. We could watch their progress day by day from the extreme tip of the feeler right down to its base. They then disappeared, and would next be seen sitting on the side of the glass or rock, or lying on their sides, but always with their tiny feelers stretched bravely out. We also had whitish grey anemones. These had a curious habit of plastering themselves over with minute particles of sand or weed. We have now exchanged them for a small red one, streaked on the sides with green.

This term, as in duty bound, we are giving more attention to molluscs. We have a good-sized limpet, who has never moved from the side of the globe since the first day; a large and a very small mussel, which has been seen to walk, using its foot in much the same way as the worm seems to use its head end, but how so fine and fragile-looking a point can draw the bulky creature after it remains a mystery to me. We have also a deep-sea bivalve, found on the gigantic roots of seaweed thrown up after a storm. It is small and white, and has two syphons as long as itself—perfect tubes, which seem joined together along the sides. We have five kinds of univalve, three vegetable feeders. One of the flesh-eaters is a common white whelk, the other from the deep sea, caught in a fisherman's net. It is beautifully fluted and marked with brown, very lovely in shape, with a very small operculum, not nearly sufficient to close up the entrance to its shell. It has a long white syphon finely speckled with black, which is not a perfect tube, but is more like a long flat flap, rolled up so that its two sides join except at the end. This syphon seems to have some sense of touch or smell, for when a little

raw fish is held near, the syphon is waved about until it touches the fish, then the creature advances rapidly upon the food, extends its trunk, and sucks down quite large pieces. Unlike the other molluscs, it loves the dark rather than the light, but I have not yet found a trace of its cannibal propensities in the death of any of its harmless companions.

The only univalve whose foot has a dividing line through the whole length of it and who obviously uses first one side and then the other when walking, is the periwinkle; and here comes in one advantage of studying creatures in a glass bowl—one can so often see the under as well as the upper side, the interior as well as the exterior. The very rasp of the limpet can be seen, deep yellow, restlessly scraping at the hard, unsympathetic glass, as well as the mantle, fringed with minute hair-like parts: the gills lining the shell, the feelers folded peacefully over the creature's head in sleep, the first to move when it awakes.

The children insist upon calling the serpulid a crocodile! In sunny weather he cautiously puts out his little stopper, then suddenly flashes out and stands at the "door of his house in a rainbow frill." He has two green flaps which fold back over the shell, as well as the frill, which is grey or red. There are many queer, tiny beings living on or in the rock—waving thin arms which emerge from invisible holes or bowing their tiny feathered rays this way or that. Some can only be seen through the magnifying curve of glass and water.

We have a wee crab, which is much tamer than he used to be, and simply loves a barnacle. We had a lot of those once! We also had sandhoppers, which the anemone much enjoyed, and we now have thousands of tiny ones which sometimes cloud the sides of the globe.

We sometimes catch a glimpse of a brittle star. There should be three, all about half-an-inch from tip to tip of rays; they are so comic in their contortions!

We are always making new finds. I have not told of nearly all that we have seen. The children are all very keen, and

the pets are so quiet and need so little attention that I am sure many more of us would keep an aquarium if it were only known how easy it is to manage. Fresh water once a month or so if possible. If it evaporates, the bowl should be filled to high-water mark (stamp paper on the outside) with fresh or distilled water. Growing green seaweed, kept healthy and free from decaying ends, is most important. A periwinkle is a help. Plenty of light, but not too hot sunshine. Few large creatures—not more than four an inch across in a bowl holding two quarts. Feed when convenient—every two days or two weeks—with small pieces of raw fish offered on the end of a paint-brush. Any pieces uneaten must be taken out at once.

These are the only rules I keep—and a very large aquarium I once kept healthy with the same water for nearly two years. It is useful to have an annex with few creatures and plenty of weed for extras or invalids.

Hermit crabs need specially fresh water, and I think a rock that projects from it. They have always died with me. I hope some one else will be more successful with them and will tell me the secret.

M. E. OWEN.

A COUNTRY RIDE.

A leisure afternoon and a sunny spring day in March, before one has had time to get used to the feeling of the year's returning warmth and growth, and a desire for spending every available moment in the newly-welcomed sunshine, called invitingly for a country ramble. Riding into X., I passed over an old stone bridge, underneath which the quiet-flowing Ouse can be seen stretching out into broad green meadows, and passing the station by the line—for the rail-road crosses the main road into the town—I took the turning to the right along a straight stretch of road in the direction of Murdford, Swaffham, and West Tofts.

The ground to the right was a stretch of barren warren, where rabbits innumerable, for which the district is famous, were lapping themselves in the sun, and ready, if alarmed, to freeze or put up a warning signal and scurry off into their burrows. On the left was a marshy swamp where I could hear some snipe drumming, a waterhen calling, and peewits with their melancholy cries flapping and tumbling in every direction. A little farther on to the left a road—one of the old drove roads of the Fens—led off between grassy fields, where a round mound with a great aspen tree in the centre stood out on the right, the site of an ancient burial ground, a sacred spot which still keeps bright the memory of those old fen dwellers who, up to the present day, in some quaint old customs and characteristics have left their mark on the race.

Passing soon a wooded copse, I struck another uphill road with bleak common on either side and a north wind to battle against, but an inviting wood of dark spruces, Scotch pines, and wellingtonias showed itself in the near distance, and the uphill toil was well rewarded, for the road soon straightened and the wind dropped. Nothing stirred the silence of the woods but the excited clucking of a startled cock pheasant and the hurried scurrying of a little pair of partridges across some fallen leaves. Beyond the wood a gentle decline led past a little row of cottages—almshouses I think they must have been—and right in the heart of the country. Old men and women were out in their neat little gardens, tending the flowers and enjoying the afternoon's sun; no other buildings were in sight, but a friendly signpost noted that a hamlet was not far off, and, turning neither to right or left, I climbed another hill, passed through another copse, and entered into the picturesque little village of West Tofts.

In a large open park stands the rectory and church, with a long open drive leading up to them on one side, and a picturesque avenue of limes, just now in ruby-budded splendour, approaching on the east.

The little church is of rough flint, quarried out of the pits

in the neighbourhood, and the oldest parts dating back to the fifteenth century. Inside the church was a rich, well-looked-after appearance; all the windows are coloured and the backs of the pews prettily carved in small round panels of various design. A paper near the lectern most conveniently tells the curious all of interest connected with the little building—how the chandelier hanging in the chancel was modelled from one in an old church at Bruges, how the great tomb on the right beneath the chancel contains the remains of one of the pious wives of a former rector and restorer of the church, who designed the roof of the chancel, which leaves an impression of different coloured thistles intertwined amidst curious stems, with a central panel in each section containing the head of a saint.

Beneath the chancel on the north side is a small side chapel, an uncommon sight in a little village church, and which, with its gaudy-coloured screen and railings, bright red and blue and gold, took away from the harmony of the rest of the interior. Palm branches—the real Eastern palm—stood on the altar, it being a few days before Palm Sunday.

Leaving the church by the lime avenue I entered into what seemed to be the centre of the hamlet, picturesquely situated in scattered groups of cottages among solitary trees, and after a slight digression regained the lodge where the park road branches off to the church, and so on to the road by which I had come, retracing my way as the sun began to lose its afternoon splendour, and later to burst forth in all the glory of a stormy fenland sunset. On the open warren near the railway a large bird—I think a kestrel—was hovering. For many seconds I watched the quivering wings, and then a sudden downward swoop, to hover again nearer earth. At length the bird made a final swerve, and dashed to the ground, where the tragedy of some luckless rabbit or bird was hidden from view by a welcome hillock.

QUINTUS.

THE FLINT WORKERS.

Continued.

As soon as the flints are carted they are brought into Brandon to the flint knappers, who do all their work in little huts made of flint and erected for the purpose. The knappers wear small leather aprons and a leather knee-cap, and, seated on a rough bench, with a deposit of fresh-dug flints by their side, they work away with their small hammers from early morning right on through the day till the last rays of light disappear, sometimes, at high pressure, going on with artificial light—the primitive candles stuck in a socket or on the window-ledge—late into the night. It is not strength or force that is needed in tapping the flints, simply knack and practice to know exactly, either by the look or ring, where to touch them, so that the right part is hit, the flint falling apart with a gentle blow, and the right piece retained and quickly shaped into a gunflint and put into one heap, and the useless chips put into another.

We watched a very skilled workman for nearly half an hour. He picked the flint up on to his knee, and nearly always the first slight blow succeeded in parting it. In an instant he knew what to retain and what to cast on the refuse heap. The useful pieces were then made up into gunflints with very sharp edges and a raised surface in the centre on one side, and quite flat on the other. Various sizes are made, and they are used, of course, for igniting the powder in flint-stock guns. The latter are not used in England now, which is the cause of the decrease in the industry, but many barrel-loads are still exported for the use of Arabs in Egypt, and some parts of Spain. This old flint knapper claims to be descended from the ancient flint workers of the Neolithic Age! However this may be, for many generations the trade has